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ABSTRACT

This study is a preliminary investigation of faculty attitudes toward the processes of promotion and tenure in higher education. It began when several colleagues joined to submit proposals to a national conference establishing a panel to discuss promotion and tenure, which were subsequently accepted. The panel proposal consisted of: (1) a comparison and analysis of the tenure and promotion process at two institutions: (2) an analysis of mentoring a newly hired nontenured colleague for the academic year; (3) an analysis of being mentored during the entry year at an institution; and (4) an analysis of the promotion and tenure process from the perspective of a female who later became an administrator. The conference attendees posed even more questions, and, as a result, a focus group was formed. Focus group results and a literature review were used to construct a questionnaire that was completed by 35 faculty members at a meeting. A chi square analysis revealed three statistically significant items, with two others on the borderline. Tenured and nontenured faculty members differed in perceptions of the importance of collegiality and collaboration and in their perceptions of the relative importance of securing grants to the promotion and tenure process. Females were more likely to think that the criteria for tenure decisions were not well known. These findings point to the need for additional study of promotion and tenure processes. An appendix contains the faculty questionnaire. (Contains 18 references.) (SLD)

Running head: FACULTY ATTITUDES

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An Analysis of Faculty Attitudes Toward Promotion and Tenure

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Wright State University

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Abstract

This is a preliminary study of faculty attitudes toward the processes of promotion and tenure in higher education. It began when several colleagues banded together and submitted proposals to a national conference establishing a panel to discuss promotion and tenure, which were subsequently accepted. The panel proposal consisted of: (1) a comparison and analysis of the tenure and promotion process at two institutions; (2) an analysis on mentoring a newly hired non-tenured colleague for the academic year; (3) an analysis of being mentored during the entry year at an institution; and finally; (4) an analysis of the promotion and tenure process from the perspective of a female who later became an administrator. The conference attendees posed even more questions about the promotion and tenure process and the need for additional study became apparent. Curious about college faculty perceptions, a focus group consisting of faculty was organized. Based on literature reviews and focus group results, a questionnaire was developed. It was used to answer the following: what is the relationship between attitudes toward promotion and tenure and current faculty tenure status? and what is the relationship between attitudes toward promotion and tenure and gender of the faculty? The questionnaire was completed by thirty-five faculty members attending a faculty meeting. A *chi square* analysis revealed three items were statistically significant, with two others on the borderline. Discussion of the differences follows. Written comments supplied by the respondents are also detailed. Conclusions include a recommendation for further research to increase the database (population) to enhance future statistical analysis.

An Analysis of Faculty Attitudes Toward Promotion and Tenure

Two questions dominate the literature on tenure: (a) What is it?, and (b) What shall we do with it at the institutional level? (Hutcheson. 1998). Tierney & Bensimon (1996) interviewed over 300 tenure candidates at twelve different institutions in an attempt to tell the story of tenure and promotion in higher education; answering Hutcheson's first question.

Facing Change: Building the Faculty of the Future (1999) is a report from a group sponsored by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). The AASCU organized selected Washington, D.C.- based higher education associations and public education systems to undertake an exhaustive review of institutional policies that affect faculty. The Faculty Review Project defined tenure as an effort to provide security if and when a professor wished to practice academic freedom that may or may not be controversial. It noted that somewhere along the way tenure became equivalent with job security and a guarantee of continued employment.

The group made fifty recommendations; among them were recapturing the obligations of tenure, adding more accountability to sabbaticals and incorporating part-time faculty members into the fabric of campus life. Charles Reed, Chair of the Faculty Review Project, offered that the report was the begins to answer, "so what should we do now?" This addresses Hutcheson's (1998) second question; What should we do with it?

The concept of tenure is an integral part of the employment relationship between institutions of higher education and individual faculty members (Mawdsley, 1999). Promotion and tenure decisions are often difficult and always have important long-term consequences for both the candidate and the institution (Rhoades-Catanach & Stout, 2000). As a colleague once

observed, " tenure establishes a marriage between a faculty member and the university where divorce is not an option!"

To underscore the importance of tenure decisions several researchers have compiled guidance for those preparing for tenure review. Diamond (1995) considers preparing for tenure as one of the most difficult and challenging processes a person can experience. His preparation guide crosses disciplines and offers specific strategies for document preparation. Other writers address more specific disciplines. Westney (2000) addresses tenure in relation to teaching and technology. Doost (2000) addresses tenure and accountancy while Amy & Crow (2000) offer strategies regarding recognition of computers and composition in relation to tenure and promotion.

Stone (1996) offers eleven suggestions for Ph.D. students and assistant professors for managing their tenure process. They include:

1. make a substantive research contribution to accountancy;
2. do research you love;
3. acknowledge, accept, and manage the nausea that accompanies writing;
4. do a lot of whatever works;
5. learn the craft of publishing in academe;
6. learn which aspects of teaching matter and to whom;
7. work with and benefit from one's colleagues;
8. work and hope you are lucky;
9. manage "paradigmatic clash";
10. reduce stress by cultivating " free attention"; and
11. learn to skillfully adapt to circumstances rather than carefully plan.

Doost (2000) argues against items 3, 4 and 8. Referring to suggestion 3 and the notion that writing must be accompanied by nausea, Doost feels it is wrong comparing writing as a new faculty member and that of the difficult job of dissertation writing. Doost (2000) takes issue with suggestion 4 by arguing that we should conduct research that matters and not just "whatever works." We agree with Doost (2000) and also take issue with suggestion 8, "work hard and hope you are lucky."

Doost (2000) offers alternatives from his experiences in seeking tenure. He offers Socrates famous argument, "An unexamined life is not worth living," to suggest asking what have we really contributed in our lifetime, not "working harder and harder." We propose that leaving things to "luck or a deity" is like the story that Crum (1997) tells about a man caught in a flood on the roof of his home. When a man in a rowboat came offering help, he declined saying God would take care of him. Later, when the man was waist deep in water, he denied a motorboat attempt saying God would save him. Still later, up to his neck in water, a helicopter flew over for one last attempt, the man still insisted that God would save him. After he drowned, the man asked St. Peter why God had not helped him. St. Peter shook his head and said, "What do you mean? He sent you two boats and a helicopter."

Members of our college department have shared a common interest in the promotion and tenure process, both here and at other institutions. Several colleagues worked together and submitted proposals to a national conference establishing a panel to discuss promotion and tenure which was subsequently accepted. The panel proposals consisted of: (1) a comparison and analysis of the tenure and promotion process at two institutions; (2) an analysis on mentoring a newly hired non-tenured colleague for the academic year;. (3) an analysis on being mentored during the entry year at an institution; and finally; (4) an analysis of the promotion and tenure

process from the perspective of a female who later became an administrator. The conference attendees posed even more questions about the promotion and tenure process and need for additional study became apparent.

Curious about college faculty perceptions, a focus group was organized. Recently, the use of focus groups has grown tremendously particularly in business and industry. They can be of enormous benefit to the educational researcher (Jarrell, 2000). Our focus group consisted of five participants. Jarrell (2000) reports that most authors recommend six to twelve participants. Colleagues who teach measurement courses recommended eight to twelve participants, however the number of participants depends on the objectives of the research (Stewart & Shamdasan, 1990).

Purpose of the Study

The object of this study was to conduct a preliminary investigation of faculty attitudes toward promotion and tenure. Specifically:

1. What is the relationship between attitudes toward promotion and tenure and current faculty tenure status?
2. What is the relationship between attitudes toward promotion and tenure and gender of the faculty?

Morgan (1997) lists questionnaire development and hypotheses formulation as research efforts that lend themselves to the use of focus groups. The focus group findings, a survey of available promotion and tenure documents, and a review of periodic literature resulted in a list of ten tenure practice items (Appendix A). This list provided the basis for the research questionnaire. The instrument was designed to be completed quickly by the participating faculty members, and to facilitate scoring. The questionnaire was used as an additional data source to elaborate focus group findings and literature review results. Barbour& Kitzinger (1999, p. 36) warn against the focus group as the "sole method" of inquiry.

Method

The self-report survey "Faculty Survey on Tenure and Promotion," was completed by faculty members (N = 35) attending the Spring College Faculty Meeting. The instrument solicited information grouping respondents in the following ways: (1) current faculty status, tenured or non-tenured; (2) current faculty rank, assistant, associate or professor; and (3) gender of the faculty member. Respondents answered ten items using the following Likert-type scale: strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree and strongly agree.The study's data are nominal and as such do not permit compilation of means and standard deviations. Therefore, frequencies are presented instead. A *t* test or ANOVA could not be used to test the null hypotheses and therefore the appropriate statistical test that was employed was the *chi square* (χ^2 .) Because the cell size was small, the Fisher's Exact Test was be employed within the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for *chi square* analysis.

The following null hypotheses are expressed in the study:

1. Responses to the ten instrument items will not differ significantly based on the current faculty tenure status.
2. Responses to the ten instrument items will not differ significantly based on gender.

Current faculty rank was not studied although it was measured by the questionnaire. Currently, all tenured faculty are associate professors.

Results

Table 1 shows the ten questionnaire items and the related *chi square* results. Two *chi square* values achieved statistical significance (p=<.05) based on the current tenure status of faculty respondents (whether they had tenure or not.) Therefore, Null Hypothesis 1 was rejected. Item #7, In order to be granted tenure, it is important to work collaboratively and effectively with professional colleagues, (χ^2 =10.494, p=<.001) indicates that non-tenured respondents

Table 1

Faculty Survey on Tenure and Promotion

Responses by All Respondents

Survey Questions	SD	D	U	A	SA	No Resp.	Chi-Square Gender	Chi-Square Tenure
1. Tenure procedures are clearly defined	4	10	4	14	2	1	0.063	0.646
2. Tenure decisions depend upon the quantity or published research and/or creative work	1	1	3	21	9	0	0.144	0.471
3. Tenure decisions depend heavily upon the quality of published research & or creative work	3	9	9	9	5	0	0.671	0.096
4. Tenure decisions depend heavily on outside evaluations	4	12	11	8	0	0	0.057	0.472
5. Tenure decisions depend heavily on student evaluations	2	8	7	16	2	0	0.430	0.430
6. Tenure decisions depend heavily upon committee & service work to Wright State Univ.	3	8	4	15	5	0	0.280	0.605
7. In order to be granted tenure, it is important to work collaboratively & effectively w/Professional Collegues	1	6	3	13	12	0	0.669	0.001*
8 Tenure depends on one's ability to secure grants	1	7	12	13	1	1	0.145	0.026*
9. The criteria used for tenure decisions are well known in my department.	5	10	10	6	2	0	.012*	0.096
10. I have found that the annual review of faculty by the dept. P&T comm. is helpful in preparing for promotion	0	4	11	12	7	1	0.315	0.133

* Less than 0.05

overwhelmingly felt that collaboration and collegiality were not important to the tenure process. Tenured faculty felt that working collaboratively and effectively with colleagues was important to the promotion and tenure process. Item # 8, Tenure depends on one's ability to secure grants. (χ^2 =4.941, p=<.026) was indicated as very important by non-tenured faculty but not nearly so important by tenured respondents. There was one statistically significant *chi square* value in the questionnaire items isolating gender. Therefore, Null Hypothesis 2 was also rejected. Item #9, The criteria used for promotion decisions are well known in my department. (χ^2 =6.250,

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p=<.012) with females indicating more disagreement with the statement suggesting they felt that they or other members of the department did not have a clear understanding of the criteria.

Two other *chi square* values came close to achieving statistical significance, but did not achieve it. Item # 4, Tenure decisions depend heavily on outside evaluations, (χ^2 =3.630, p=<.057) had responding females indicating that they did not feel the importance of outside evaluations that the males did. Item #1, Tenure procedures are clearly defined, (χ^2 =3.453, p=<.063)again found females indicating that some mystery surrounds the promotion and tenure criteria whereas males did not share that view.

The instrument, "Faculty Survey on Tenure and Promotion," included a space allowing respondents to write in additional comments. Ten respondents wrote comments as follows:

- solely one variable does not make or break tenure
- new bylaws have helped clarify requirements
- we are in a transition from fairly general and philosophical criteria to more concrete and detailed and quantifiable criteria for P&T
- nice idea, this could be an article, analysis by rank, gender
- P&T has been an uneven process. Department bylaws should help this situation.
- #9: The criteria keep changing. Mentoring does not exist.
- Bylaws will help clarify procedures when they are approved.
- Teaching load should be considered when expectations are defined.
- Criteria have changed in almost every conversation with authorities; from 7-10 articles mostly single author to 6 peer-reviewed, to time in grade matters.
- The perception is P&T is smoke-n-mirrors process, but the bylaws (hopefully) will/should help clarify & crystallize specific criteria so P&T is a pre-planned process and not something that could be the whim of the "senior leader of the day." Thanks, for asking for input.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to conduct a preliminary investigation of faculty attitudes toward promotion and tenure. Specifically:

1. What is the relationship between attitudes toward promotion and tenure and current faculty tenure status?

2. What is the relationship between attitudes toward promotion and tenure and gender of the faculty?

The population of this study was limited to the college faculty that attended the annual Spring College Faculty Meeting (N=35). Additionally, some respondents chose not to complete all ten questionnaire items. While three of the instrument questions resulted in statistically significant *chi square* values, the Fisher's Exact Test was employed because of the low numbers in some cells. This will not be necessary when additional data is collected of sufficient size.

Self-reported data from the survey, "Faculty Survey on Tenure and Promotion," indicated that two *chi square* values achieved statistical significance based on current faculty status (whether or not they had tenure.) In Item #7, tenured and non-tenured respondents differed on the importance of collaboration and collegiality. It is interesting to note that Mawdsley (1999) argues that collegiality is a factor in tenure decisions and gives twenty-four good reasons; that is how many legal tenure cases he cited in his research on collegiality! In Item #9, tenured and non-tenured respondents differed in their perception of the relative importance of securing grants to the promotion and tenure process. Those with tenure thought that acquiring grants was of little importance. Somehow, the responding non-tenured faculty feel that obtaining grants is important.

In the second analysis, by gender,females felt that criteria used for tenure decisions were not well known whereas males did not agree (Item #9). Item #1 is similar to Item #9 in that it asks if respondents felt that tenure procedures are clearly defined. This was a borderline value and clearly shows females indicating that tenure procedures are not clearly defined, the opposite of the male respondents.

The written comments indicate a belief that newly developed college and department bylaws will establish more concrete guidelines for promotion and tenure. Once the new bylaws are in effect, perhaps we should poll the faculty to assess whether this area is clearer than before.

The comments also indicate a perception on the part of some non-tenured faculty that the process is unfair and criteria are ever-changing. Perhaps our study indicates a need to better define what collaboration means. Does it mean "collegiality" or does it mean "combined research efforts"?

More research is needed to establish a database of sufficient numbers to examine these questions in a more statistically valid and reliable manner.

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APPENDIX

Faculty Survey on Tenure and Promotion

The purpose of this survey is to solicit faculty perceptions and beliefs regarding tenure and promotion at Wright State University. In order to insure the confidentiality of your responses no personally identifying information is needed or requested. In an attempt to gather the most useful information you are encouraged to respond honestly and frankly.

Current faculty tenure status: Tenured ❒ Untenured ❒

Current faculty rank: Assistant Professor ❒ Associate Professor ❒ Professor ❒

Gender: Male ❒ Female ❒

Please read each of the following statements and indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each by checking the appropriate column.

SD =Strongly Disagree D=Disagree U=Uncertain A=Agree SA=Strongly Agree

		SD	D	U	A	SA
1	Tenure procedures are clearly defined					
2	Tenure decisions depend upon the **quantity** of published research and/or creative work					
3	Tenure decisions depend upon the **quality** of published research and or creative work					
4	Tenure decisions depend heavily on outside evaluations					
5	Tenure decision depend heavily on student evaluations					
6	Tenure decisions depend heavily upon committee and service work to Wright State University					
7	In order to be granted tenure, it is important to work collaboratively and effectively with professional colleagues					
8	Tenure depends upon one's ability to secure grants					
9	The criteria used for tenure decisions are well known in my department					
10	I have found that the annual review of faculty by the departmental P&T Committee is helpful in preparing for promotion					

Use the space provided to make any additional comments you wish to make.

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